

MASS. UM106.2: L34/4/IMM.  
April 2002



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The Mauricio Gastón Institute  
for Latino Community Development  
and Public Policy

## Latinos in Massachusetts: IMMIGRATION

### Legal Immigration to New England During the 1990s

by Enrico A. Marcelli

*The Mauricio Gastón Institute of the University of Massachusetts Boston conducts research on and for the Latino population. A goal is to generate the kind of information and analysis necessary to develop sound public policy, and to improve Latino participation in the policy-making process. The Gastón Institute has produced this series of fact sheets in an effort to present up-to-date information about the issues affecting Latinos in a number of key areas: Education, Health, Housing, Immigration, and Political Representation.*

#### INTRODUCTION

THIS FACT SHEET SUMMARIZES INFORMATION ABOUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION FLOWS TO THE NEW ENGLAND REGION DURING THE 1990S EMPLOYING IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE DATA. Although the annual number of legal permanent residents (e.g., green card holders) from Latin America and the Caribbean fell during the decade, as a percent of all legal immigrants who settled in New England their representation rose. Among all Latin American and Caribbean immigrants who settled in the region, more than half chose Massachusetts or Connecticut. And although most reported working in lower-skilled occupations, from 10 percent to 30 percent of immigrants from each country were working in professional, administrative, or technical support positions. Finally, at least 80 percent of all new legal permanent residents from each nation except Haiti relied on family-based entry categories to obtain their new status.

## Immigration Trends

DURING THE 1990S, APPROXIMATELY 28 PERCENT OF ALL 319,542 FOREIGN-BORN PERSONS WHO BECAME LEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN THE SIX-STATE NEW ENGLAND REGION ORIGINATED FROM LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN NATIONS. Among the remaining 72 percent, 30 percent came from Asian countries, 30 percent from European countries, and 12 percent were from other areas. The annual number of immigrants gaining legal permanent resident status in New England peaked in 1993 at just over 40,000 (about the number of residents currently residing in Chelsea) and fell to slightly less than 30,000 as of 1998 (the last year for which Immigration and Naturalization Service public-use data are currently available) (*see figure 1*). Latin American and Caribbean immigrant representation during this period rose 6.5 percentage points, from 25.8 percent in 1990 to 32.3 percent in 1998.

The top five Latin American- and Caribbean-sending nations included the Dominican Republic (25 percent), Jamaica (14 percent), Haiti (13 percent), Colombia (8 percent), and Brazil (6 percent). The percentage of recent legal immigrants from Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Ecuador, and Honduras ranged from two percent to five percent each (*see table 1*).

## Settlement Patterns

FROM A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE, THE DISTRIBUTION OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN IMMIGRANTS WHO SETTLED INITIALLY IN PARTICULAR STATES MIRRORING THAT OF ALL IMMIGRANTS. For instance, among all immigrants, 58 percent settled in Massachusetts and 27 percent settled in Connecticut between 1990 and 1998. Among Latin American and Caribbean immigrants, 54 percent settled in Massachusetts and 33 percent in Connecticut.

Dominicans are the largest group of immigrants coming from any one Latin American or Caribbean country in three New England States – Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire (*see table 2*). Alternatively, there were relatively more Jamaicans in Connecticut

Figure 1.  
Regional Origin among Recent Immigrants in the Six-State  
New England Region, 1990-1998



Table 1

### Caribbean & Latin American Immigrants to New England by Country of Origin, 1990-1998

Country of Origin	Total	Percent
Dominican Republic	22,349	25.1
Jamaica	12,402	14.0
Haiti	11,460	12.9
Colombia	7,155	8.1
Brazil	5,069	5.7
Peru	3,950	4.4
Guatemala	3,775	4.2
El Salvador	2,602	2.9
Mexico	2,502	2.8
Ecuador	2,181	2.5
Honduras	1,888	2.1
Other	13,545	15.2
Total	88,878	100.0

Table 2

### Caribbean & Latin American Immigrants to New England by Country of Origin and Initial State of Residence, 1990-1998

Country of Origin	MA	CT	RI	NH	MN	VT	Total
Dominican Republic	15,622	1,995	4,330	346	43	13	22,349
Jamaica	3,603	8,451	168	63	93	24	12,402
Haiti	8,363	2,649	351	71	20	6	11,460
Colombia	2,311	3,010	1,582	189	42	21	7,155
Brazil	3,270	1,419	150	144	56	30	5,069
Peru	1,122	2,552	188	54	54	37	4,007
Guatemala	1,615	702	1,307	58	40	21	3,743
El Salvador	1,895	494	151	40	24	10	2,614
Mexico	761	1,161	230	179	87	55	2,473
Ecuador	589	1,329	170	82	14	8	2,192
Honduras	1,270	427	85	35	37	25	1,879
Other	7,270	4,803	823	353	174	112	13,535
Total	47,691	28,992	9,535	1,614	684	362	88,878

and Maine, and more Mexicans in Vermont. The majority of immigrants from each of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, except the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, settled in either Massachusetts or Connecticut. Although almost 70 percent of all Dominican immigrants settled in Massachusetts, another 19 percent established roots in Rhode Island. Whereas 43 percent of all Guatemalans who settled in the New England area came to Massachusetts, another 35 percent went to Rhode Island. The majority of all other leading Latin American and Caribbean immigrant groups conformed to the general pattern of settling in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Fully 97 percent of Jamaicans settled in these two states, as did majority percentages of Haitians (96 percent), Colombians (74 percent), Brazilians (93 percent), Peruvians (93 percent), Salvadorans (91 percent), Mexicans (78 percent), Ecuadorians (88 percent), and Hondurans (90 percent).

### Labor Market Position of Recent Immigrants

HAITIANS, BRAZILIANS, AND PERUVIANS HAVE THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF IMMIGRANTS WORKING EITHER IN PROFESSIONAL/MANAGEMENT OR TECHNICAL/ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT OCCUPATIONS – THOSE OFTEN REQUIRING HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION (see figure 2). Alternatively, a relatively higher percentage of Colombians, Guatemalans, and Hondurans are employed in less-skilled occupations – those that often require little formal education. Still, despite this disproportionately high representation among less desirable jobs, most remaining Caribbean and Latin American immigrant groups (except Salvadorans) have at least 20 percent of their workforce employed in professional/management, technical/administrative support, and higher-skilled (e.g., precision, craft and repair) occupations.

Figure 2.  
Caribbean and Latin American Immigrants Age 16-64 by Occupation in the New England Region, 1990-1998

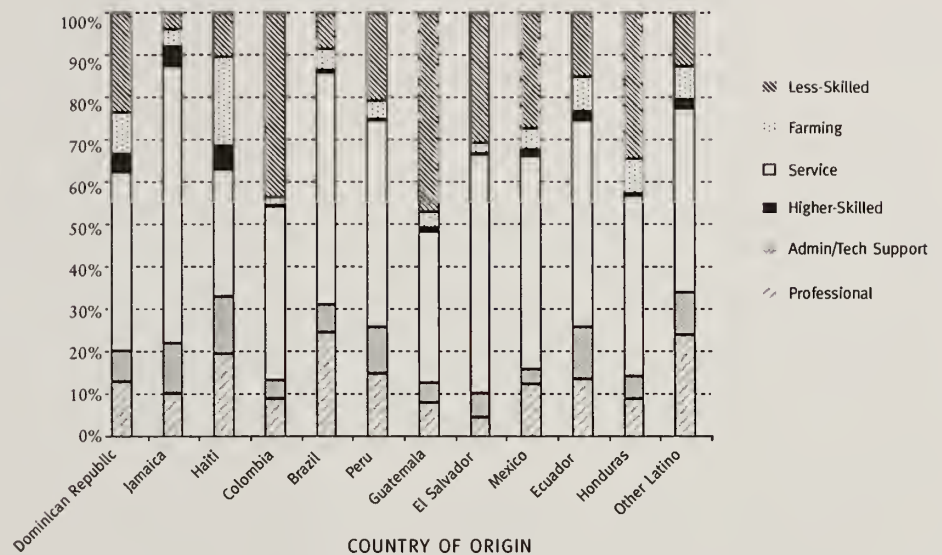
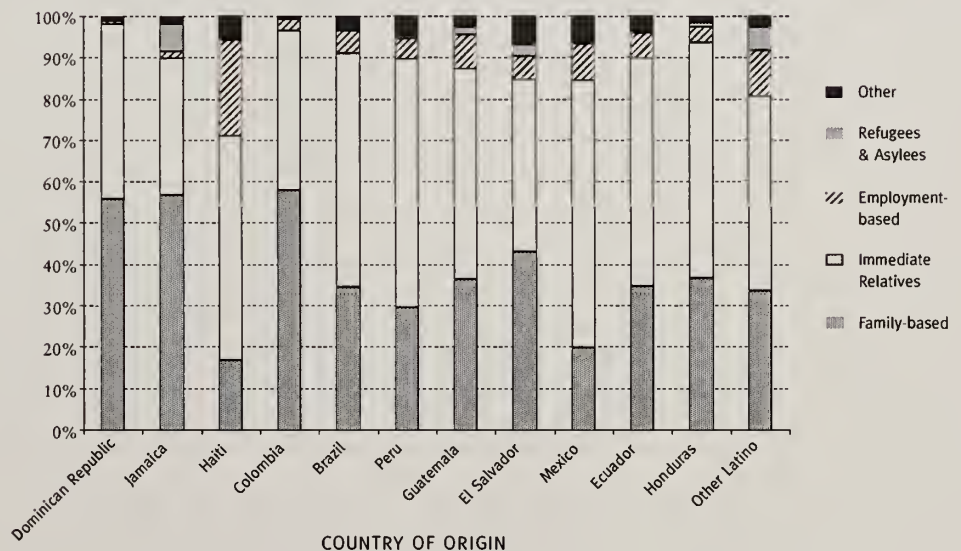


Figure 3.  
Caribbean and Latin American Immigrants by Country of Origin and Class of Admission in the New England Region, 1990-1998





### About the author

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### Entry Categories of New Legal Permanent Residents

MOST IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES ACHIEVE LEGAL PERMANENT RESIDENT STATUS THROUGH ONE OF TWO NUMERICALLY LIMITED IMMIGRATION PREFERENCE CATEGORIES: EMPLOYMENT-OR FAMILY-SPONSORED. Examples of the former are those with exceptional abilities and less-skilled workers who fill a particular labor-market need. Examples of the latter include adult children and siblings of U.S. citizens and spouses and unmarried children of legal immigrants. However, many other legal entrants are not subject to congressional numerical caps. These include spouses, minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens ("Immediate Relatives"), and refugees and asylum seekers who are in the

process of adjusting their status to legal immigrant. A number of "Other" legal entrants include children born abroad to legal immigrants, diversity immigrants selected from a lottery, and dependents of immigrants who were legalized through the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.

A snapshot of the legal-entry categories that were most used by Caribbean and Latin American immigrants during the 1990s in the New England Region reveals that a relatively high percentage of Haitian immigrants legalized through one of several employment-based preference categories. Although there was considerable fluctuation from country to

country in the share of immigrants who adjusted their status through one of the family-based categories, when these proportions are added to the immediate relative category every nation except for Haiti had at least 80 percent rely on family sponsors to become legal permanent residents.

### Conclusion

CARIBBEAN AND LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS WHO SETTLED IN THE NEW ENGLAND REGION DURING THE 1990S not only continued to be an important source of population growth but also brought a diverse set of skills to the regional labor market.

### Note:

This fact sheet does not include information relating to Latinos of Puerto Rican origin. This is because Puerto Ricans (who make up 46.5% of all Latinos in Massachusetts) are not counted in INS surveys. Since Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, residents of the island are not considered foreign-born and are not defined as immigrants by the U.S.